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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: PREL PTER CE LTTE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TWO VIEWS OF THE EAST - TRINCO
MOSTLY CALM, AMPARA EDGY

Refs: (A) Colombo 371 (B)Colombo 1249

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Chargi d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The diversity of the humanitarian and security situation in the east is shown by differences between Trincomalee and Ampara. In Trinco, the humanitarian situation is gradually improving and the area is generally peaceful. Meanwhile, at the other end of the east, Ampara is tense due to a GSL crackdown on the LTTE, but LTTE-Muslim relations have calmed. The difference in the security situation in Trinco and Ampara may be that ongoing tit-for-tat violence farther south of Trinco in Batticaloa and Ampara has tied the Tigers' hands? The LTTE cannot afford to wage anything but a campaign for hearts and minds in Trinco. In both areas, the LTTE is seeking to educate itself about development, likely to prepare for administering its proposed ISGA. END SUMMARY.

Humanitarian Situation Gradually Improving in Trincomalee

¶2. (SBU) Poloff traveled to the northeastern coastal district of Trincomalee August 1-3. With the second-best natural harbor in the world, Trincomalee has long been seen as strategically important to both the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the Sri Lanka Navy headquarters its eastern fleet there. The population of Trinco District is nearly evenly divided among communities - 38% Muslim, 31% Tamil, 29% Sinhalese - but it wasn't always. Tamils deeply resent past GSL efforts to dilute the Tamil population in the area by promoting Sinhala colonization schemes meant to drive a wedge between Tamils in the north and east.

¶3. (SBU) Since the GSL and the LTTE signed a Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) in February 2002, Trincomalee District has seen an increase in economic activity, primarily from tourism. Humanitarian assistance in the area is changing from relief to development-oriented activity.

¶4. Sutaram, Assistant Program Director for UNICEF told poloff that the business environment is improving, and many hotels are refurbishing to meet increased tourist demand. However, the uptick in economic activity has not yet trickled down to benefit the 20,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the District, whose difficult living conditions remain basically unchanged. 85% of IDPs are Tamil, 10% Sinhala, and 5% Muslim.

¶4. (C) Many IDPs in Trinco have not returned to their homes (most have been displaced from areas within the district) for several reasons: their land is mined, they have no land to which they can return, or they live in what they perceive to be an unsafe area. Often, they cannot return to their homes because of limited infrastructure (e.g., water or schools) or because they have no access to livelihoods. Nearly 90% of IDPs in Trincomalee town live with family and friends, rather than in IDP camps. UNHCR Representative Brita Helleland noted that because some IDPs have gone home, the number of people living in welfare centers in Trincomalee District is declining: in 2003 there were 4000 IDPs in camps, but this year there are only 2,500. She explained that while social problems associated with welfare centers - petty crime, illegal alcohol production, drug use, and the showing of pornographic films - do exist, they are not as severe as they are in welfare centers in other parts of the country (e.g. Jaffna). She noted that last year the LTTE opened an office in one of the camps, which UNHCR successfully asked the Tigers to close.

¶5. (C) Local government officials from village council to provincial council report regular engagement with local LTTE leaders, who profess an interest in learning more about development activities. The LTTE are also conducting a needs assessment survey. For the past

three weeks, 150 LTTE cadres from the Wanni went door to door in both LTTE- and GSL-controlled areas asking Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims what they need to return to normalcy. The cadres are also collecting biodata from Tamil families and offering them the "opportunity" to have three months of voluntary military training. Government Agent (GA) Gamini Rodrigo noted that the Tigers requested a meeting with staff in his office to talk about development - so the Tigers (and not the LTTE-affiliated Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO)) could offer up their own ideas about development in the LTTE-controlled areas in Trincomalee District. On August 6, the LTTE met with members of Rodrigo's staff to submit development proposals to the GSL, which are under consideration.

16. (C) In a meeting with poloff on August 3, North East Provincial Council Chief Secretary S. Rangarajah spoke briefly about the development activities he oversaw, but really wanted to talk about issues relevant to the LTTE. The Tigers have a warm relationship with the North East Provincial Council, where tens of millions of dollars from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank for rehabilitation of the north and east are funneled. [Note: The Provincial Council functions only as an administrative body, as the LTTE has not allowed provincial council elections in the north and east in over a decade. UNICEF's Sutaram commented that because there are no elected members, the structure is actually working very well-ostensibly because political interference is minimal and Provincial Council administrative representatives are "professional," rather than political. End note.] Rangarajah strongly advocated the implementation of the LTTE's Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) as a solution to the rehabilitation and resettlement needs of people of the north and east. He claimed that the central government and national legal system are impediments to these processes and suggested that the LTTE could take over the administrative machinery needed to accomplish these goals instead. He said that the LTTE is interested in learning about development. [Note: Rangarajah's public appointment board showed LTTE meetings scheduled for later the same day. End note.] Rangarajah also confided (please protect) that the LTTE "wanted him to work for the ISGA," (for the LTTE)a proposal he said he was seriously considering. Finally, he urged the international community and the USG to encourage the opposition United National Party (UNP) to support the GSL negotiations with the LTTE and declared that there will be a decline in the peace process if the "no war/no win" situation continues.

Trincomalee Security Situation Mostly Calm

17. (C) Trincomalee appeared calmer than other areas of the east, where killings continue almost daily. GA Rodrigo noted that the area was generally peaceful. Only one of the dozens of killings by the LTTE in the last month has taken place in Trincomalee (reported septel). Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) interlocutors report that there are few repercussions from the LTTE's internal break in March, when eastern LTTE military leader Karuna broke away from LTTE supremo Prabhakaran. SLMM contacts noted that most Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) violations in Trinco stem from the ambiguous border between LTTE- and GSL-controlled territories. Child abductions and child recruitment are also the source of a number of violations, although cases reported to the SLMM are declining. UNICEF's Sutaram reported that child recruitment in Trinco is slowing, but cautioned that town residents were much more likely to report recruitment than rural residents. ICRC's Trinco Representative Patrick Walder noted that people are coming to ICRC with recruitment complaints, but it is ICRC's policy not to share this information with the more "political" UN agencies, including UNICEF.

18. (C) Days after poloff's visit, however, an (anti-LTTE) Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) member was killed in Trinco on August 10. In subsequent demonstrations, the EPDP accused the LTTE of the murder. In an earlier conversation with poloff, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission Trincomalee Head Dagfinn Aadnanas described the EPDP as in "hiding," and not very active. He reported that police guard the office and that most EPDP members had resigned their membership and now support the organization privately instead of publicly. Tension between the LTTE and Muslims continues, occasionally manifested by hartals (general strikes) called by either the LTTE or Muslim community leaders. The SLMM reported that while there are allegations of radical Muslim groups organizing in Muttur (south of Trincomalee), there is no evidence of a serious problem.

19. (SBU) Jayantha Wijesekera, first-time Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP) MP from Trincomalee, is an enthusiastic advocate for his adopted constituency - self-reported as local farmers and fishermen from Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities. A JVP member since 1986, Wijesekera was originally a paddy farmer, but left his own fields to become a community organizer. He is Sinhalese, but switches from Sinhala to Tamil with ease, and claims a diverse voter base: 15% Tamil, 25% Muslim, and 60% Sinhala. In a conversation with poloff, Wijesekera was more concerned about obtaining development resources for his local constituencies, like paddy seed and improved irrigation, than with national politics. Trinco GA Rodrigo noted that Mr. Wijesekera was the only Trinco MP who has submitted his proposals for the approximately US \$50,000 funding for development proposals each MP is allocated.

10. (C) Wijesekera's ideas about the peace process are in line with the usual JVP rhetoric. He professes to believe in the integration of communities and that, by working together for the good of the country, these groups will forget their differences. Wijesekera said he envisions achieving peace in Sri Lanka through greater state employment which, he explained disingenuously, the GSL could achieve simply by building more factories. He asserted that people with jobs and full stomachs will forget their differences - and if the 10,000 GSL job vacancies in the north and east are filled, there would be no need for the LTTE's Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA). He also reported that people in Trinco are concerned about the separation of the east from the rest of the island, and are worried that if peace talks begin there will be a division of the country. Wijesekera asserted that he has proven to the LTTE that he is working for all communities. He noted that the LTTE comes to talk to him, although he attributed their interest to a turf-conscious concern that he is helping Tamils.

Ampara Humanitarian Situation

11. (C) The population of Ampara, on the southeastern coast of the island, has suffered its share of displacements due to conflict, but has been able to recover more easily than other areas. A decade ago about 10,000 people were displaced - mostly Tamils from coastal areas, although some Muslims were also displaced. IDPs stay with friends and family; there are no welfare centers in Ampara. The population of Ampara District is 41% Muslim, 40% Sinhala and 18% Tamil. Barriers to IDP return are fewer, especially because very few areas in Ampara District are landmine-affected. However, access to livelihoods continues to be a problem for many people, including the area's farmers and fishermen. While Ampara District is considered GSL controlled, there are pockets of LTTE-controlled areas. Development activities in Ampara, which are supposed to be overseen by the GA, appear to lag considerably behind initiatives in Trincomalee.

Security Situation: STF Crackdown on LTTE

12. (C) The Israeli, British, and U.S. trained paramilitary Police Special Task Force (STF) is in charge of security for Ampara District, rather than the Army. Some interlocutors report that the LTTE respects the STF for its discipline and its fighting ability. In the past decade, many members of this highly trained unit have moved to higher positions in Colombo, and some high-ranking police interlocutors admit that the STF has consequently lost some of its strength. Following Karuna's defection in March, (Reftel A), the situation in Ampara became extremely tense, according to SLMM interlocutors. An EPDP politician and town council leader of a local village was killed by the LTTE on July 21 (Reftel B), and the GSL ordered a crackdown on the Ampara-area LTTE. The STF increased its checkpoints and policing activities - providing a visible reminder of GSL control in Ampara. The LTTE reacted negatively, complaining to the SLMM that the STF was trying to provoke the LTTE to break the Cease-Fire Agreement and demanded that the STF change its checkpoint procedures. After poloff's visit, the SLMM facilitated a meeting between the STF and LTTE and worked out one point of contention. Now new checkpoint procedures dictate that female STF personnel search female LTTE cadres at checkpoints.

13. (C) Human rights interlocutors note that post-Karuna, security in Ampara is tenuous, with continued

LTTE abductions of children. They also report that human rights violations are committed by both the LTTE and the GSL, although the GSL's "violations" primarily dealt with its inability to provide government services - like distributing food to IDPs - as opposed to the LTTE's, which are typically violent.

The Muslim Perspective in Ampara District

¶14. (C) After the CFA, incidents of kidnapping, vehicle theft, ransom and taxation of Muslims in the adjacent Ampara District abated. Muslim interlocutors described the sporadic killings of LTTE opponents as an attempt by the Tigers to control the area, to gain "a dictatorship." M. A. Zubaiden, General Secretary of the Joint Security Peace Foundation, a local Muslim group, admitted that the larger Muslim population had experienced fewer incidents of LTTE intimidation since the CFA. However, he was very concerned about what would happen under the LTTE's proposed ISGA. He said that the "LTTE will never change," and that he feared Muslims would suffer under an LTTE administration. He also noted that LTTE taxation and extortion of Tamils continues. When queried about the views of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) MPs, Mr. Zubaiden charged that the MPs are concerned only about themselves and not about their communities, least of all the land issues that Muslims in the east are concerned about.

Comment

¶15. (C) The Tigers seem to be invested in improving both their reputation and their efficacy in Trincomalee District. Never a support base for Karuna, LTTE resistance in Trinco comes from Muslims, Sinhalese, and EPDP-supporting Tamils. (In contrast, Karuna enjoys an estimated 90% public support in Batticaloa.) Ongoing tit-for-tat violence farther south in Batticaloa and Ampara has tied the Tigers' hands - they cannot afford to wage anything but a campaign for hearts and minds in Trinco. More frequent Muslim community-orchestrated hartals (general strikes) over the past few months probably indicate increased Muslim insecurity about the LTTE's proposed ISGA, under which Muslims would have limited redress from a group that has historically mistreated them. The LTTE is keeping a careful watch on anyone helping Tamils - whether it be the JVP or the GSL - lest anyone usurp the Tigers' self-proclaimed role as savior for the Tamil people. Meanwhile, inadequate GSL development efforts in Ampara leave the area more vulnerable to JVP influence in the interior, and LTTE influence along the coast. Throughout the east, the LTTE is seeking to educate itself about development, likely to prepare for administering its proposed ISGA.

ENTWISTLE